Title

Noticing for Equity to Sustain Multilingual Literacies

Journal

Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 63(4)

ISSN

1081-3004

Authors

Patterson Williams, AD
Higgs, JM
Athanases, SZ

Publication Date

2020

DOI

10.1002/jaal.1025

Peer reviewed

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY ASSOCIATION

Noticing for Equity to Sustain Multilingual Literacies

Alexis D. Patterson Williams, Jennifer M. Higgs, Steven Z. Athanases

Noticing is central to human thinking and activity. What we perceive, or fail to perceive, shapes our decisions and actions. As such, what teachers notice during everyday classroom life has important consequences for equitable pedagogies that sustain young people's dynamic multilingual literacies.

Research has established that teacher noticing is highly selective and subjective. What teachers attend to is heavily shaped by their pedagogical commitments, what Erickson (2011) defined as teachers' philosophies of practice that comprise their basic beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching. Pedagogical commitments influence teachers' professional vision (Goodwin, 1994) by highlighting particular things in their perceptual fields that teachers then use to construct narratives about learners and organize learning opportunities. Thus, the enactment of equitable instruction hinges on pedagogical commitments that enable teachers to notice students' varied linguistic and cultural-historical repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003) and take actions that leverage them (Martinez & Caraballo, 2018). A growing body of research has drawn attention to ways that teacher noticing can bolster or destabilize educational injustices for learners, particularly those from nondominant and marginalized backgrounds (Hand, 2012; Patterson Williams, 2019; van Es, Hand, & Mercado, 2017; Wager, 2014). Given the interconnected nature of pedagogical commitments, teacher noticing, and practice, the supports that teachers receive to foster equitable noticing are crucial.

Collectively, we are former classroom teachers of English language arts and science. Currently, we are researchers and teacher educators who are part of a multiyear grant-funded project focused on how early-career teachers learn to develop dialogic instruction in diverse classrooms. As partners in a Teachers as Learners in Diverse Classrooms project, we offer a lens to guide noticing for equity that foregrounds pedagogical commitments that can help teachers notice students' rich, multilingual practices as learning resources. We build on and connect Winn's (2018a, 2018b) transformative pedagogy framework, which centers race, history, language, and justice, and Mason's (2011) notion of a dynamic inner witness to conceptualize the continual learning and unlearning, viewing and re-viewing at the heart of equitable, socially just teaching.

To illuminate aspects of our noticing for equity framework and demonstrate the applicability of the framework to diverse learning contexts, we offer two vignettes: one from a secondary English education setting and one from a middle school science setting. We argue that to sustain multilingual literacies, teachers must (a) develop commitments to ways that race, language, history, and justice matter to their students, and (b) receive support in learning how to notice and take action for equity. We unpack these two imperatives in more detail next.

What Is Teacher Noticing?

By *noticing*, we refer to what one attends to despite the barrage of information presented (Hand, 2012). Teacher noticing, or what teachers attend to, has three main components: attending to classroom interactions, interpreting or sensemaking about what is observed, and deciding how to respond to what is observed (Jacobs, Lamb, & Philipp, 2010). Teacher noticing is not random or objective. Instead, the teacher's attention is guided by variations in teacher preparation, cultural experiences,

ALEXIS D. PATTERSON WILLIAMS is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis, USA; email adpatterson@ucdavis.edu.

JENNIFER M. HIGGS is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis, USA; email jmhiggs@ucdavis.edu.

STEVEN Z. ATHANASES is a professor and the Dolly and David Fiddyment Chair in Teacher Education in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis, USA; email szathanases@ucdavis.edu.

 doi: 10.1002/jaal.1025

pedagogical commitments, and other factors. What a teacher notices and responds to has far-reaching impact: Teacher noticing can inform lesson flow, learning outcomes, the classroom culture, the identities that students develop, and the language and literacy practices that are included or excluded.

What Is Noticing for Equity?

Understanding impacts of teacher noticing on learning opportunities is crucial for educators seeking to create spaces that foster and sustain multilingual literacies. How a teacher responds to the status and positioning of students, which students are participating or merely taking up space, and which communication modes are deemed appropriate for learning can influence whose ideas are taken up and how students engage with subject matter. These are just a few ways that teachers notice for equity, which we define as the ability to see, interpret, and respond to behaviors both within and outside of the classroom that facilitate equitable interactions, participation, and learn.

Noticing for equity requires intentionality because there are countless stimuli to observe in teaching. The extent to which one notices varies and can range from not noticing (you were present but have no recollection of the stimulus), barely noticing (you can recall stimuli if your memory is jogged), marking (you make a point to remember a striking stimulus), and recording (a stimulus is so profound that you are intentional about maintaining vivid description of the occurrence).

Marking and recording a specific event requires more energy than not noticing or barely noticing. Thus, "the discipline of noticing provides a structure within which to work on noticing intentionally" (Mason, 2011, p. 42). It becomes imperative for teachers to develop an inner witness, or the intentional self-observation necessary to sustain disciplined attempts to notice issues of justice in teaching, including multilingual literacies (Mason, 2011).

What frameworks can teachers draw on to develop their inner witness and sharpen their ability to notice for equity? Although there are many frameworks that teachers can use to develop a critical lens, we find that Winn's (2018a, 2018b) restorative justice for literacy education framework offers particularly generative lenses for noticing for equity, given our attention to sustaining multilingual literacies. Winn argued for the pedagogical potential of attending to how four key factors impact students, learning opportunities, schools, and communities. Each of these four lenses are pedagogical stances. We briefly summarize them before turning to vignettes that illustrate how these lenses might guide noticing for equity:

- *History matters:* This stance considers the histories of lives, schools, and communities to challenge oppressive structures that restrict teaching and learning.
- *Race matters:* This stance requires practitioners to grapple with how racist ideas (e.g., a teacher's cultural biases) might influence their perceptions of their students as learners.
- *Justice matters:* This stance highlights the social imperative to "grapple with history and engage in what needs to be done so that all children and their families receive justice in the form of access to high-quality teaching and learning opportunities" (Winn, 2018b, p. 37).
- *Language matters:* This stance centers language as a key tool for addressing history, race, and justice in the classroom. Language carries meaning in all disciplines and provides educators with opportunities to shape or dismantle students' potential pathways.

Noticing for Equity in Action

We present vignettes from two culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms—the first from an English education context and the second from a physical science class—to show teacher noticing in inequitable ways and teacher noticing for equity that makes space for and sustains multilingual literacies. In both cases, K–12 students leverage multilingualism to make sense of academic material.

Lisa (all names are pseudonyms), a white preservice teacher, works in a 10th-grade class of emergent bilinguals. During a methods class with preservice English language arts teachers, she passes around writing samples that her students produced as they read Act II of William Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which the character Claudio is tricked into believing that his lover, Hero, is having an affair with another man. Lisa wanted students to demonstrate understanding of Claudio's feelings about being betrayed.

Lisa reports to her peers that although she is pleased overall with students' grasp of the text, she is concerned about writing produced by Juan, a Latino male designated as intermediate in English-language proficiency. Lisa initially characterizes Juan's representation as "a cartoon with swear words." After further examination of his multimodal composition with the course

instructor, Lisa realizes that Juan's analysis is astute and complex.

Juan has shown comprehension of complex multicharacter interactions, using labeled meme figures common on the internet to depict Claudio's witnessing of what he had been told is a betrayal. Juan adds nuance, hinting at suspicion of Don John, party to the lie ("But one of the[m] act strange like he was acting"), depicting Don John as a dragonhead (a popular meme) with the caption "Bad guy." Juan captures Claudio's voice, feelings, and tone: "We saw that bastard making out with my love." In the visual, Juan adds: "Why she no love me? Shame on her. I will destroy her!" Juan adds analogy: "Make me feel went I'm playing Halo 4 and about to get kill spree and I die. Like f***ing s**t." Here he references a video game involving unknown threats on an ancient civilization planet, capturing the depth of Claudio's pain.

Lisa's initial noticing is correct: Juan uses a cartoon, social media genres, and profanity in this assignment. However, her traditional conceptions of academic literacy prevent her from noticing for equity, which here entails perception of the range of linguistic and popular culture resources that Juan uses to demonstrate comprehension. Using Winn's (2018a, 2018b) restorative justice for literacy education framework, we see how historically pervasive ideologies undergirding what counts as academic discourse can limit what teachers view as valid knowledge in their classrooms.

Discussion with her course instructor offered new perspectives that helped Lisa see Juan's work in a different light, but had the teacher developed her own inner witness oriented toward equity, Juan's fluid, multimodal meaning making may have been visible to her independent of the instructor. Further, a developed ability to notice for equity may have created openings for Lisa to share her noticing with her students and with her preservice colleagues. For example, using Juan's work as a springboard, she could have facilitated a discussion with her 10th graders about taking creative license in academic writing and the context-dependent use of different languages.

Our second case is situated in the eighth-grade physical science class of Danielle. A black woman in her first year of teaching, Danielle works in a school where 80% of the students are black or Latinx. To familiarize students with the various elements on the periodic table, she asks students to select and create a poster of an element. The posters must include the symbol, atomic number, a drawing of the atomic structure, the element's characteristics, and its most common uses, among other information. The students are to present their posters during a gallery walk activity.

During the gallery walk, Danielle notices that Akeem, a black male student, includes pictures of rappers E-40 and Mac Dre in the atomic configuration. Confused, she asks Akeem how the rappers relate to the atom he selected. He explains that Mac Dre's picture is being used for the electrons, which have a negative charge, because his rap music, which features drugs and other explicit activities, has a negative influence on kids. In contrast, Akeem continues, E-40 represents the positively charged protons because he is more positive with his lyrics, highlighting the good things happening in the community and increasing hometown pride.

Danielle is pleased by Akeem's creativity and asks what rapper could represent the neutrons. She walks away, leaving him to ponder that question. At the end of the gallery walk, Danielle asks Akeem to share his representation with the class, hoping the analogy might help her students remember the valence of each subatomic particle.

Danielle's understanding of the cultural relevance of E-40 and Mac Dre to this local context enables her to leverage Akeem's self-to-text connection for academic learning within the broader class. In addition to an awareness of the cultural context, she sharpened her lens toward equity, or her inner witness, by reading books about racial injustice, attending workshops, and gathering resources to teach science in equity-oriented and socially just ways, as well as listening to her students share their experiences with injustice and how they take action to address it.

In both of these classroom cases, the teacher receives a rendering of content that she had not predicted. In the first example, although Lisa notices Juan's academic contribution and use of different linguistic repertoires, she does not interpret his language choice and knowledge representation as academic or valuable, which leads her to mockingly share his work with her peers. It is not until Lisa receives redirection from the course instructor that she notices the complexity of Juan's ideas. Conversely, Danielle notices Akeem's ideas, intentionally marks them, and shapes her pedagogical response to his ideas. Her inner witness cultivated toward equity influenced her decision to make space for Akeem's ideas by asking him to extend his analogy and highlighting his representation as a valuable resource worthy to be shared with the entire class.

Recommendations for Teachers

We have offered a lens for understanding students' rich, multilingual literacies, such as those illustrated in the vignettes, as learning resources. We argue that explicit

attention to history, race, language, and justice can shift pedagogical stances: It can help teachers leverage students' resources for learning (Martinez, Morales, & Aldana, 2017) and act in ways that sustain students' repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). We recognize that pedagogical shifts are rarely easy and that teachers may need support in developing the lenses we propose here. In this spirit, we offer some ideas for how teachers can apply a noticing for equity lens to sustain multiliteracies.

Mason (2011) argued that people need to prepare to notice for particular purposes. As noticing for equity is a very purposeful activity, we recommend that teachers draw on Winn's (2018a, 2018b) restorative justice for literacy education framework as a resource to help them prepare to notice for equity. We view the pedagogical stances of history, race, justice, and language as fundamental to developing an equity-oriented inner witness attuned to the ways in which students' learning opportunities, schools, and communities are impacted by systemic injustices. This requires awareness of how history, race, language, and justice matter in the disciplines and how these four dimensions have shaped teachers' and students' identities.

Mason (2011) also posited that people need to find alternative ways to notice to shift perception. In other words, we need new tools to respond differently. He argued that teachers can expand their noticing repertoire by observing colleagues engaged in admirable, desired practices. In this way, teachers may adjust practice through observing teachers who notice and engage history, race, justice, and language in their teaching. Observing teachers with a strong inner witness oriented to equity provides teachers who are developing new noticing practices with (a) concrete, classroom examples of what it looks like to notice and respond through these pedagogical lenses, and (b) alternative ways to see and respond beyond what is typical on an individual level and for their disciplines.

We encourage collegial observations where possible, but we also know that such requests can place undue burdens on practitioners who may already experience significant demands of their expertise, time, and emotional labor. When observations are not yet possible, there are various resources that teachers can access, such as conferences, professional development workshops, practitioner magazines (e.g., *Rethinking Schools*), and online professional learning communities that provide examples of how to teach for equity. We urge teachers to take seriously the power of noticing. As mentioned in our introduction, noticing is rooted in Goodwin's (1994) notion of professional vision: Every professional is trained and immersed in particular ways of noticing artifacts within a particular field. Teachers and teaching are no different.

Although explicit language instruction is an important element in supporting multilingual literacies, teachers interested in sustaining multilingualism must also look beyond explicit instruction. We have argued that part of the development of a teacher's professional vision must include noticing around language, history, race, and justice. These perspectives enable us to teach in equitable, transformative ways and to create and sustain learning spaces in which students' multilingual literacies are valued and in which their varied language practices are leveraged as powerful learning resources.

NOTE

The research and writing reported in this column were funded, in part, by a grant from the James S. McDonnell Foundation 21st Century Science Initiative—Understanding Teacher Change and Teachers as Learners (grant 220020519; Steven Z. Athanases, principal investigator).

REFERENCES

Erickson, F. (2011). On noticing teacher noticing. In M.G. Sherin, V.R. Jacobs, & R.A. Philipp (Eds.), *Mathematics teacher noticing: Seeing through teachers' eyes* (pp. 17–34). New York, NY: Routledge.

Goodwin, C. (1994). Professional vision. *American Anthropologist*, *96*(3), 606–633. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1994.96.3.02a00100

Gutiérrez, K.D., & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher*, *32*(5), 19–25. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X032005019

Hand, V. (2012). Seeing culture and power in mathematical learning: Toward a model of equitable instruction. *Educational Studies in Mathematics*, *80*(1/2), 233–247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10649-012-9387-9

Jacobs, V.R., Lamb, L.L.C., & Philipp, R.A. (2010). Professional noticing of children's mathematical thinking. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, *41*(2), 169–202.

Martinez, D.C., & Caraballo, L. (2018). Sustaining multilingual literacies in classrooms and beyond. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *62*(1), 101–104. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.764

Martinez, D.C., Morales, P.Z., & Aldana, U.S. (2017). Leveraging students' communicative repertoires as a tool for equitable learning. *Review of Research in Education*, *41*(1), 477–499. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X17691741

Mason, J. (2011). Noticing: Roots and branches. In M.G. Sherin, V.R. Jacobs, & R.A. Philipp (Eds.), *Mathematics teacher noticing: Seeing through teachers' eyes* (pp. 35–50). New York, NY: Routledge.

Patterson Williams, A. (2019). *Noticing for equity*. Paper presented at the Teachers as Learners Teacher Partners Institute: University of California, Davis.

van Es, E.A., Hand, V., & Mercado, J. (2017). Making visible the relationship between teachers' noticing for equity and

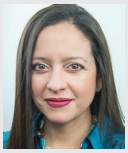
equitable teaching practice. In E.O. Schack, H.F. Molly, & J.A. Wilhelm (Eds.), *Teacher noticing: Bridging and broadening perspectives, contexts, and frameworks* (pp. 251–270). New York, NY: Springer.

Wager, A.A. (2014). Noticing children's participation: Insights into teacher positionality toward equitable mathematics pedagogy. *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, *45*(3), 312–350. https://doi.org/10.5951/jresematheduc.45.3.0312

Winn, M.T. (2018a). A transformative justice approach to literacy education. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *62*(2), 219–221. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.887

Winn, M.T. (2018b). *Justice on both sides: Transforming education through restorative justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

The department editors welcome reader comments.



LIMARYS CARABALLO is an associate professor in the Department of Secondary Education and a codirector of the English education program at Queens College, City University of New York, NY, USA; email caraballo.qc.cuny@gmail.com.

DANNY C. MARTINEZ is an assistant professor of language, literacy, and culture in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis, USA; email dcmar@ucdavis.edu.